



State of Vermont Web Page Design Guidelines

Introduction

These proposed web standards are design recommendations to make the State of Vermont websites more accessible, citizen-friendly and compliant with the generally accepted web standards on a world-wide basis. These guidelines are also available at:

<http://www.vermont.gov/webmasters/standards.html>.

Web Site Design Issues

- **Font Design** - According to usability studies, san-serif fonts are more easily readable on a computer screen. When selecting fonts, it must also be available on your visitors' computers for them to view the fonts you specify. For example, if you specify "Technical" as the font to use and your visitors do not have "Technical", their computer will substitute a font, which might not be the font you'd consider acceptable. Arial and Helvetica have been selected for this reason, as each font comes standard with either the Microsoft or Macintosh operating systems.

Font Face of Non-Graphic Text – All text or headers should use the "Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif" font face (applied: ` text `).

Font Size of Non-Graphic Text – On a font size scale from 1 through 7 (3 being default) size 3 is recommended for headers or page titles and size 2 is recommended for body text (applied: `text`). Sizes 3 and 2 are equivalent to 12 point and 10 point sizes in your standard word processor application.

Stylesheets - As an alternative to the `` tag, a stylesheet can be used to format the text. For those of you that would like to clean up your HTML code, a stylesheet can be applied. Here are some steps to insert your font size and font face as a style sheet.

Step 1: insert the style guide into the head of the HTML page `<head></head>` tags

```
<head>
  <style type="text/css">
    <!--
    .text { font: 12px Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif}
    -->
  </style>
</head>
```

Step 2: insert the style class into the tag surrounding the text you wish to format.

```
<span class="text">Hello world!</span>
```

You can see the use of stylesheets in action by going to:

<http://www.vermont.gov/webmasters/templateSample.html>



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- **Color Scheme** – Usability studies indicate that for body text, users can most easily read black text against a white background and so we recommend the same for clarity and common look.
- **Vermont.gov logo** – Each site should have the Vermont.gov logo placed on the page to indicate it as an official state site. View the “Agency Template” image below for an example. For an electronic version of this logo, go to:
<http://vermont.gov/about/resources.html>.
- **Header & Footer** – The Vermont header and footer will be given to each agency in order to give all state agencies a common look and feel, this will give citizens surety that they are dealing with Vermont State Government. Because the header and footer tie to the Vermont.gov site, they will be distributed to the agencies as JavaScript tags that are inserted into the HTML, as follows:

Step 1: Insert this JavaScript tag into the HTML at the top of your page to produce your header.

```
<script language="javascript" src="http://Vermont.gov/nav/header.js"
type="text/javascript"></script>
```

Step 2: Insert this JavaScript tag into the HTML at the bottom of your page to produce your footer.

```
<script language="javascript" src="http://Vermont.gov/nav/footer.js"
type="text/javascript"></script>
```

If you view the source of this URL:

<http://www.vermont.gov/webmasters/templateSample.html>, you can see how the JavaScript tag works for the header and footer.

- **Standard Header**



- **Standard Footer**



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Navigation Issues

- **Left-hand navigation** – According to usability studies, Internet users are accustomed to navigating through a site using links located on the left side of the screen. Thus we strongly recommend left-hand navigation as well (refer to site layout attached). This will give consistency in site navigation through out the State of Vermont. Example:
<http://www.vermont.gov/webmasters/templateSample.html>
- **Breadcrumbs** – This technique is used as a means for orientation and as a way to return to previous pages. The example below provides your current navigation on the site. You started with the home page and are currently on a page called “Agency List”.

[Home](#) | [eGovernment 24/7](#) | [Branches of Government](#) | Agency List

- **Home Page Link** – Each site should link back to the site’s home page for consistency in site navigation.
- **Agency Information** – Each site should have an “about” section that describes the function of the agency and its services. This will also give consistency in site navigation through out the State of Vermont.
- **Contact Information** – Each site must contain contact information including but not limited to: emails, phone numbers and street addresses for the agency. This will also give consistency in site navigation through out the State of Vermont.
- **Naming Conventions** – Common links throughout websites should be referred to in a consistent basis. The following are common navigational and site links:
 - 1) Site Map – aka “site layout” or “site organization” – refers to a complete breakdown of the various pages and page hierarchies in a site
 - 2) Frequently Asked Questions or FAQ – aka “Common Questions” or “Advice” – a compilation of common questions, concerns or problems that visitors to the site or office inquire.
 - 3) Home – aka “Start” or “Begin” – this is the splash or front page that a user would first come to when visiting a site (usually named index.html or default.html).

Page Formatting

- **Page Width** – Agency web pages must be viewable without horizontal scrolling on an 800 X 600-pixel screen display.
- **Frames** – the use of frames should be avoided on Web sites since screen readers cannot read them intelligently. See W3C guidelines on frames and alternatives to frames (<http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10-HTML-TECHS/#edef-NOFRAMES>).

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- **Meta Tags** – These tags identify the contents of a web page. Recommended Meta Data Builder: <http://www.vermont.gov/webmasters/metatagbuilder.html>. Recommended meta tags are:
 - 1) **author** – The full name of the agency / division / office responsible for either the creation of the document or the information contained within the document.
 - 2) **description** – A brief narrative sentence that summarizes the content and purpose of the information on the web page.
 - 3) **keywords** – These are words or phrases that refer to the contents of the page in question.
 - 4) **subjects** – When used properly these terms assist in automatically classifying the web page into a Yahoo-like directory for additional access by the user.
 - 5) **pubDate** – This is the date the publication is placed on the web. This allows searching of documents by date of origination.
 - 6) **resourceType** – This tag describes what type of information the web page provides, such as directories, instructions, laws and regulations, etc.
 - 7) **govType** – This tag describes the level of governmental entity of the producer of the information on the page.
 - 8) **dispositionDate** – This is the year the publication is expected to be removed from the web.
 - 9) **format** – This tag describes what type of page is being accessed (html, Word file, Excel spreadsheet, picture, animation, audio file, etc.).
 - 10) **medium** – This tag describes the physical material type on which the information is stored.
 - 11) **language** – The language in which the page is presented
 - 12) **robots** – This refers to the automated spiders that search engines use to accumulate web site information.
 - 13) **revisit-after** – This refers to how often a robot would visit the site.

Produced Results

```
<META NAME="author" CONTENT="Vermont.gov">
<META NAME="description" CONTENT="This is a test Description">
<META NAME="keywords" CONTENT="test, homepage, Vermont, eVermont, state web site, Vermont Government,">
<META NAME="subjects" CONTENT="Vermont, State of Vermont, News, Online Services">
<META NAME="pubDate" CONTENT="2002/09/01">
<META NAME="docType" CONTENT="homepage">
<META NAME="govType" CONTENT="state">
<META NAME="dispositionDate" CONTENT="2005/09/01">
<META NAME="medium" CONTENT="HTML">
<META NAME="language" CONTENT="en-us">
<META NAME="robots" CONTENT="all">
<META NAME="revisit-after" CONTENT="30 days">
```



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Accessibility Issues

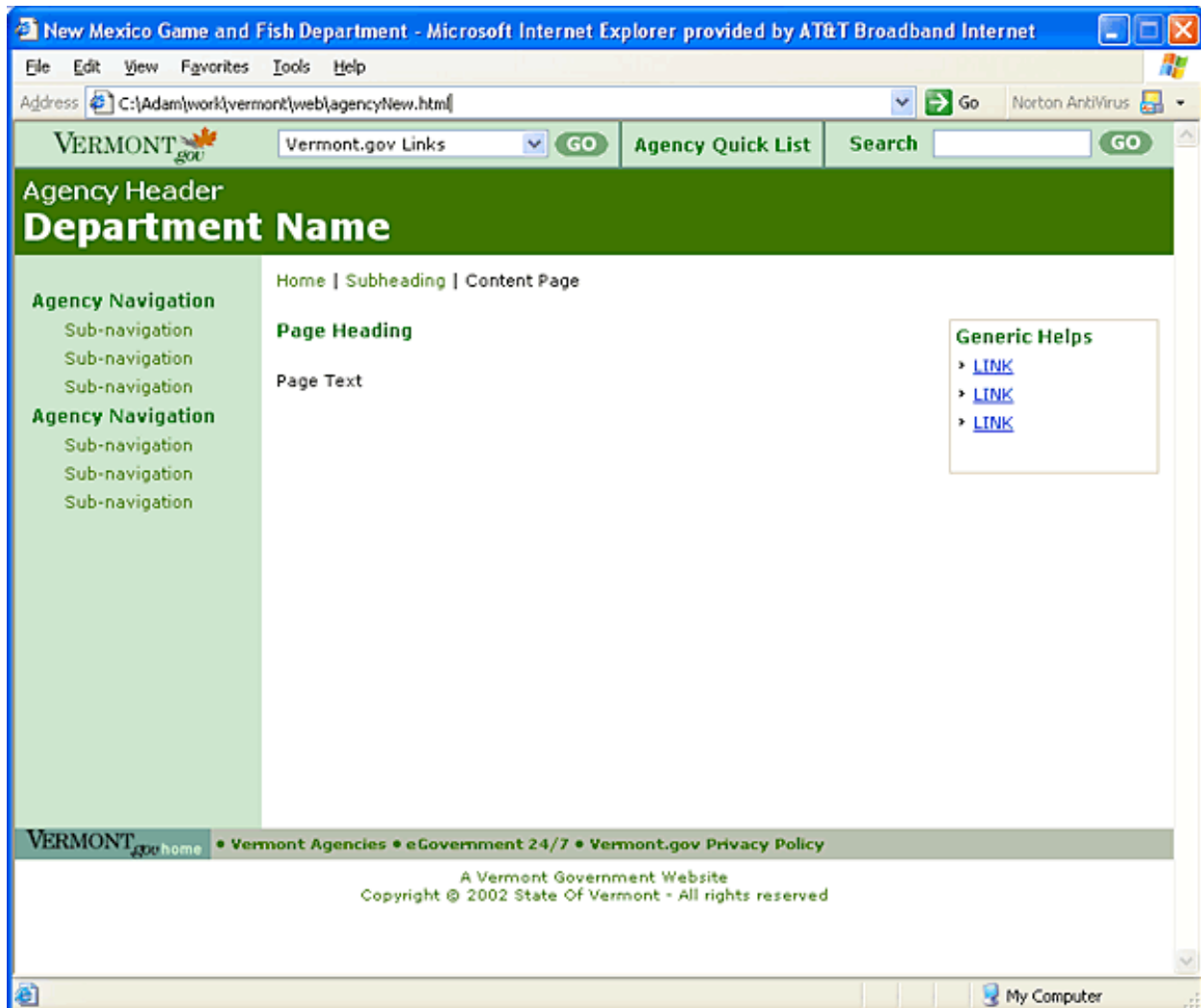
Please refer to the Current State Web Standards on web accessibility issues (available at http://vermont.gov/portal-policies/accessibility_policy.html). The attached accessibility checklist will help guide you to ensure your web site has equal access to electronic information, while the following are four simple ways to increase compliancy.

- All Meta Tag data is inputted;
- ALT tags on all images;
- Text version of website;
- Provide downloads to plug-ins needed to view the site or create alternates so plug-ins are not needed (PDF to HTML).



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Agency Template



For more information and resources to apply these guidelines, go to:
<http://www.vermont.gov/webmasters/toolkit.html>

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Checklist of Design Considerations for Accessibility

In response to the need to insure equal access to electronic and information technologies for individuals with visual, physical or developmental disabilities, the federal government has developed a set of web design standards, known as Section 508.

The following list has been compiled from various sources. The purpose of this list is to provide a summary of the types of issues to consider when creating and designing accessible HTML pages so that government information can be available to all.

Universal Design

- ☐ Maintain a standard page layout throughout the site.
- ☐ Avoid the unnecessary use of icons, graphics and photographs.
- ☐ Use plain backgrounds and simple layouts to improve the readability of text.
- ☐ Provide a text-only index of your site.
- ☐ Include textual as well as graphical navigation aids.
- ☐ Do not abbreviate dates; e.g., use December 1, 1996 rather than 12/1/96.
- ☐ Test your web pages with a variety of web browsers, including graphical browsers with the images turned off and a text-based browser, if possible.
- ☐ Avoid/Limit the use of HTML tags or extensions which are supported by only one browser.
- ☐ Check images at different resolutions and color depths.
- ☐ Hyperlinks to downloadable files should include a text description that includes the file size and file type.
- ☐ Consider the development of a text-only version of the document or site to facilitate access not only by people with visual impairments, but users of non-graphical browsers or slow Internet connections.

Text-Based Design

- ☐ End all sentences, headers, list items, etc. with a period or other suitable punctuation.
- ☐ Avoid/Limit using side by side presentation of text, e.g., columns and tables; Consider using preformatted text which is available in all versions of HTML and can be displayed with all type of browsers.
- ☐ Provide alternate versions of forms; alternatives might include a simple list or paragraph of what is needed to submit a form entry and then provide a link to a mailto: feature or simply an appropriate e-mail address to send the text.
- ☐ Minimize the number of hyperlinks that appear in a single line of text - one hyperlink is best; consider using vertical lists for links wherever possible.
- ☐ Avoid/Limit the use of bitmap images of text.
- ☐ Consider beginning lists with a descriptive identifier and the number of items so the users will have an idea of what the list represents and the total length of the list. Using numbers instead of bullets will also help the user to remember items that interest them.

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- ☐ Provide meaningful and descriptive text for hyperlinks, don't use short hand, e.g. "click here." (Screen readers can search specifically for linked text; "click here" provides no indication of where the link will take them.) If documents are provided in a specialized format (e.g. PDF, etc.) provide the equivalent text in ASCII or HTML format.

Graphics and Images

- ☐ Keep the number of colors in your images to a minimum.
- ☐ Minimize the file size and number of images you display on any one page.
- ☐ Design your background image at the lowest color depth and resolution you can.
- ☐ Ensure that text can always be clearly read at any location against the background.
- ☐ Avoid/Limit using image maps; provide an alternate text-based method of selecting options when image maps are used, e.g., separate HTML page or menu bar.
- ☐ Use the [ALT] option within image tags to provide associated text for all images, pictures and graphical bullets.
- ☐ Consider using described images: provide a hyperlink (the capital letter D is being used at various sites) to a short paragraph describing the image.
- ☐ If image files are used for graphical bullets in place of standard HTML, it is best to use a bullet character like an asterisk " * " or "o" in the ALT = text field of the tag (rather than describing the bullet as: "This is a small purple square").

Audio/Visual Features

- ☐ Provide text transcriptions of all video clips.
- ☐ If possible include captions or text tracts with a description or sounds of the movie.
- ☐ Provide descriptive passages about speakers and events being shown through video clips.
- ☐ Give a written description of any critical information that is contained in audio files contained on your web site.
- ☐ If you link to an audio file, inform the user of the audio file format and file size in kilobytes.